Kentucky Literacy Link

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Inside This Issue:

Your questions **and your contributions of ideas/lessons that work** are welcome. E-mail those to rebecca.woosley@education.ky.gov, and they may be included in this **literacy link** to connect teachers across the state by sharing insights, bright ideas and best practices.

Items of Interest

KCTE/LA 75th Anniversary Conference

Teaching Moving Forward/Looking Back – 21st Century and Learning

When? February 25 and 26, 2011

Where? Marriott –Cincinnati at RiverCenter
Covington, KY

Here's a glimpse of what's on the conference agenda:

- Terry Holliday, Commissioner of Education, will provide the opening address.
- Sara Kajder, author of *Adolescents and Digital Literacies: Learning Alongside Our Students* and a featured speaker at the 2010 NCTE convention, will share her expertise.
- Kentucky Department of Education consultants will discuss the ELA Common Core Standards with an emphasis on implementation at elementary, middle and high school.
- Audrey Harper, of South Warren High School, will present a session about incorporating traditional texts with 21st-century literacies.
- Amy Cody, of Walton-Verona Middle School, will discuss formative assessment and how it can make the teacher and student more efficient in the classroom.

To register and receive more complete information, visit http://www.kcte.org/.

College and Career Readiness Standards - A Spotlight Revision

Picture this scenario. A teacher invests instructional time working students through lessons scaffolded around how to write a focused lead paragraph, how to organize and develop ideas, and how to write an appropriate conclusion. Students are even given time in class to write their first drafts. After students have written their drafts, the teacher announces that the final drafts are due in two days – and then adds, "Don't forget to revise." When the papers are turned in, the teacher is surprised and disappointed when the products show little or no evidence of revision beyond minor editing. These results are not uncommon in many classrooms, but writing instruction that includes embedded revision strategies can change the outcome. If students learn **how** to make revisions throughout the writing process, rather than only at the very end, they will be more likely to make meaningful revisions.

In the Kentucky Core Academic Standards (KCAS) Production and Distribution of Writing, standards four and five require teaching students to –

- produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience
- develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting or trying a new approach

Teachers see evidence every day that the ability to make effective revisions to their writing is not an innate skill students possess. Because the production of writing is difficult for many students, they "fall in love" with their first drafts. When they share their writing with their teacher, they are often disappointed when they discover their teacher *isn't* in love with it. Worse yet, when the teacher identifies weaknesses in their writing and wants students to revise, students are discouraged. There's no question -- teaching students to write well is not an easy process, but when students are taught how to revise, the results are more satisfying for students and teachers.

There at least two contributors to the lack-of-revision problem. Students "…lack competence in detecting or correcting problems…" (Graham, et.al., 1991) and teachers "may lack the knowledge of how to help students who have many needs" (Saddler, 2003). If the teacher's learning target is for students to be able to make effective revisions to their communications, the instruction that fosters student ownership and meaningful revision needs to be broken down into specific strategies students can use. In the words of Carol Dweck, professor of psychology at Stanford University, "…we can design and present learning tasks in a way that helps students develop a *growth mindset*, which leads to not just short-term achievement but also long-term success."

Teachers should choose specific revision strategies to meet the needs students demonstrate as they work their way through the writing process. As students apply specific strategies to their own writing, they gain the competence and the confidence that empowers them to revise their own communications.

As the new year begins, and teachers resolve to improve writing instruction, **Ten Tips**, gleaned from research and proven classroom practice, can guide teachers and benefit students.

Ten Revision Tips

1. **Make sure students understand why they need to revise**.
   Help students see writing as more than the "busy work" done in English classes. Guide them with models and practice improving **their own** work to understand that the purpose of writing is to communicate (Saddler).

   Part of convincing students there is a need to revise can come from community members in professions where they write and revise what they write every day. One strategy teachers can use is choosing people from career areas of interest to students and asking those career representatives to explain the job-required writing they do **and** why sending out a first draft is not their practice. This "testimonial" experience provides convincing voices beyond the classroom. Above all, when students write about issues of importance to them and their targets are real audiences who have the power to take action,

students will be invested and they will be more likely to revise for their own reasons.

2. **Provide time in class for students to revise their writing**.
If teachers want students to revise, it's important to show them it is a valuable part of the communication process by providing time revising in class (Smede). Based on the learning target, students can apply the new strategy to their own writing. That application will give students a chance to see how it impacts what they are trying to communicate. It also will help them begin to internalize the value of taking time to revise. What's more, guided-practice time in the classroom, with the teacher there to provide encouragement and any necessary individualized instruction, reinforces students' confidence with a no-risk opportunity to improve their own writing. As students engage in this critical part of the communication process, teachers can formatively assess student learning and make timely instructional decisions.

3. **Teach students how to do "sentence makeovers."**
Arthur Plotnick (2004), contributing editor of *The Writer* magazine, recommends fixing "poor construction" with "sentence makeovers." The structure of a single sentence makes all the difference in how it connects ideas, thoughts and details shared in the sentences that come before or after it. Repeating key ideas or words from a previous sentence; using transitional phrases that demonstrate the relationship of the idea or detail in one sentence to the one it follows; and substituting synonyms in subsequent sentences are all effective ways to create transition and build thinking bridges for the audience.

Plotnick also recommends teaching students to avoid putting the modifier "out on a limb." He recommends teaching students to fix dangling modifiers by making sure that verbs "refer to the intended subject." Teachers can inject an engaging element of humor into mini-lessons designed to teach the concepts of dangling modifiers and misplaced modifiers. Part of the humor comes from the unintended meaning of the sentence; the rest of the humor can be made visible, if the teacher asks students to illustrate, with an image, what the sentence seems to say. For example, picture the image students might create with this sentence: *Jane spent the afternoon on the patio with her little puppy wearing sunglasses and sipping iced tea*. Or picture the image for this sentence: *Buster was a lovable bulldog owned by Aunt Tillie who had bowlegs and a wrinkled face.* The humor and the images help imprint the skill on a student's memory. Later, when students need to apply the concept to new writing, reminding them of the mini-lesson associated with dangling modifiers will help them recall the lesson and the strategy.

4. **Help students 'see' their repetition so they can vary sentence beginnings and sentence lengths.**
Try the following classroom-tested strategy to help make repetitious sentence beginnings visible to students.

- Ask students to pick one or two paragraphs from something they have written.

- Next, have them create three columns on a clean sheet of paper.

- Have students label the first column "Sentence Beginnings." When students record the first two or three words of every sentence there, they will quickly see the repetition.

- Ask students to label the second column "Sentence Lengths" and then record the number of words in each sentence. This step will make repetitious sentence structure visible.

- Students need to label the last column "Verbs." Listing the verbs they've used in each sentence will make their use of dull, repetitious verbs obvious in their writing (Smede).

The 'next steps' for teachers and for students are clear. Use models to show students the effectiveness of writing without repetition. Ask students to describe what the writer did and then ask students to use their lists and apply what they have learned to improve those elements in the two paragraphs they just dissected. The grand finale is asking students to share the "before" and "after" versions with each other, so the impact of their revision is obvious to everyone.

5. **Engage students in replacing tired verbs with specific, vivid, action verbs (George).**
Use models to show students how replacing verbs whose action is smothered by some form of the verb *to be* can create more dynamic writing. For example, changing, "They were dancing and laughing..." becomes more dynamic when 'were' is eliminated and the verbs are changed to danced and laughed. Students need to also see that sometimes the writer's use of a passive verb is less effective. For example, "Her dark, brooding eyes were shaded by a wide-brimmed sun bonnet." Change the

sentence to, “A wide-brimmed sun bonnet shaded her brooding eyes.” Replacing passive verbs with active ones turns the sentence around and expresses a more dynamic voice with the vivid, active verb.

The use of models is an additional strategy validated by *Writing Next* as one of 11 effective elements teachers can use to improve student writing achievement. When teachers show students models to help them see the impact of a strong, active verb instead of a weak verb, it enhances their ability to improve their own writing. For example, if a sports article describes the actions of a football player in a game by saying, “He went quickly down the field and into the end zone to score the winning touchdown,” students will quickly criticize the description as weak – especially if the students are athletes! However, if the same article says, “He charged down the field, hurtling himself into the end zone to score the winning touchdown,” students will easily be able to see and describe the impact of vivid verbs.

The obvious next step - ask students to apply these verb revision strategies to something they have written and share their results.

6. Remind students that tense matters.

Writers need to know that control of verb tense makes an important difference for their audience. Using present tense creates the effect critics describe as “immediacy” (Plotnik, 2003). Show students the impact of using the real-time tense to give readers a sense of being on the spot when the action happens. Then show them examples to illustrate when to use past tense. Engage students in a discussion about how to decide when to use each tense. It’s also important to show students the confusion that results when the writer carelessly shifts tenses. In each case, give students a chance to apply the revision strategy to their own work and then give them a chance to share their results and their insights with each other.

7. Involve students in using specific and concrete nouns and adjectives (Hale).

Help writers see the impact when the words used in description create strong, visual images. For example, when a writer says *old heap, junker, limousine* or *Ferrari*, instead of *car*, the audience sees a very different mental image. Even details related to color can create definitive, vivid images, such as **royal** blue and butter yellow. As in every case, ask students to apply the strategy so they can see the impact that revision has on their own writing.

8. Teach students how to use sensory details to show instead of tell (George).

When writing descriptively about a scene or a situation, students need good models to demonstrate how much more effective and engaging their writing can be when they concentrate on using showing details. Ask students to describe how they know it’s cold outside before someone says, “It’s cold.” They may describe seeing icicles hanging from the gutters, frost on the window, a cloud of white when someone speaks or breathes cold air or they may suggest other details. It’s important to engage them in discussions about the effect on the audience when the writer shows instead of tells. Whether teachers ask students to write a new descriptive paragraph or find one to revise in work they have previously done, it is important for students to immediately apply the strategy and to talk about its impact.

9. Teach them how to make their title and their lead paragraph more effective with revision.

Often students do not realize how unappealing the title for something they’ve written can be. Using titles from several types of text as models, ask students to draw conclusions about what the writer did to engage the audience. To broaden their insight, ask the same question about the “audience hook” the writer used to provide the reader a way into the piece. Students will identify several techniques, such as beginning with a question, a startling fact, an engaging anecdote and several other techniques. It’s important to guide their discussion and their observations about why the writer chose a particular technique. That reason is generally tied to the author’s purpose and reflects analysis of the target audience.

Once students have engaged in that process, they need to revisit their titles and their “hooks” and decide whether each engages the target audience and accomplishes the writer’s intended purpose. Students need to know it is not uncommon for successful writers to revise their lead paragraphs several times until they are satisfied it does what the writer meant for it to do.

10. Teach students how to revise their conclusions.

Frequently students fail to see the relationship between the introduction and the conclusion in the piece they write. They need models and practice applying the concept of developing a conclusion that “circles back” to the purpose in their introduction. Even when students do write a conclusion, they don’t understand how to decide which

kind of conclusion is appropriate. Engage them in a discussion about how to match purposes and conclusions. Ask students to create a T-chart they can keep in their writer's notebook. Some of the examples to share with them are:

- conclude by circling back to the focus in the introduction
- conclude persuasive writing with a call-to-action
- conclude analysis with synthesis that leaves the reader with a thought-provoking insight
- conclude personal writing with reflection about personal insights
- conclude informational writing with an evaluation, an explanation or a final recommendation
- conclude a variety of genres with a quote that provokes thought, provides summary, or completes the purpose of the piece

The ultimate objective is to help students see that revision shapes their message, improves their communication and strengthens their style. As students learn revision strategies, teachers can focus them on targeted revision that matches their individual communication needs. To deepen students' learning and ensure they will be able to apply revision strategies independently, it's important to always provide adequate opportunities for reflection about their learning.

References

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Plotnick, A. (2004). Sentence Makeovers: To fix poor construction, put your ear to the work. *The Writer.* Waukesha, Wisconsin: Kalmbach Publishing Co.

Saddler, B. (2003). "But teacher, I added a period!" Middle Schoolers Learn to Revise. *Voices in the Middle.11. 2.* Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

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"…you actually *can* change how your students approach revision as you model specific revision strategies with you nearby. The key is changing students' mindset about what revision means, why it's important, and how to achieve it…. students should come to realize a draft is just that – a draft, and that the need to revise is not a sign of failure, but rather an expected step in the writing process."

Bruce Saddler

Turning the Page

Glossing is a simple revision strategy that engages students in active reflection about the "what" and the "how" involved in making meaning more clear when they communicate. It can easily be modified for use by students of all ages and ability levels. The process of glossing helps students think and write about their revisions. It also gives teachers a formative assessment tool to help determine students' writing needs and progress (Alexander).

What is Glossing?

In a nutshell, glossing is a process that engages students in the process of **using** feedback to make purposeful revisions to their writing. Then they highlight what revisions they've made and they explain how and why they made those revisions. Ultimately it leads to more careful, focused revisions, saves teachers time, and transfers ownership of the revision process to the student.

How does it work?

1. Provide feedback to students through either conferencing or written guidance to focus their revisions.

2. Ask students to highlight changes they make during the revision process. For example, if the student revises his conclusion so it circles back to the focus idea in his lead paragraph, he would highlight the new conclusion.

3. Next, the student adds comments in the margin explaining what he did. In this situation, the student might say, "I revised my conclusion making a clear connection between my focused purpose and my conclusions."

   It's important for the student to use the language of the revision process instead of just saying, "I fixed my conclusion." The goal is more than asking the student to make revisions. Asking the student to explain the revisions helps a student take ownership of the process.

4. The glossing process saves the teacher time because it is easy to see immediately what revisions a student has made in response to feedback. It also allows the teacher to see the student's thinking. Knowing what a student understands or knowing what is still vague for the student, allows the teacher to make meaningful instructional decisions that match the student's demonstrated needs.

5. The last step in this process is arguably the most important step. Engaging students in the process of thinking about their own thinking is crucial, if they are going to internalize what they've learned and apply it independently. Take the time to ask students to reflect on **what** changes they made during revision as well as **why** they made the changes. Extend this metacognitive thinking by asking them to explain the impact of their revisions and how they could use this technique in other writing they will do.

This process saves precious time for teachers, transfers ownership of the revision process to the students and provides students with important insights about what they are supposed to do with feedback.

In his blog, Alexander shares two important "take-aways" for teachers. First, this process provides a "live" record that demonstrates what the student has learned as well as what needs still remain. The second "take-away" is linked to the first. Whether a teacher has a personal "sit-down" conference with the student, or "conferences" with the student using descriptive feedback written on the student's draft, the glossing process provides teachers with a viable formative assessment technique that will foster a student's growth and development as a communicator.

Reference:

Alexander, B. (September, 2010). Glossing: How to Help Your composition Students Think and Write about Revising. [Web log comment]. Retrieved from http://www.edutopia.org/print/node/31683 September 23, 2010.

Check out these links…

National Writing Project Revision Resources

http://search.nwp.org/search?filter=0&entqr=0&output=xml_no_dtd&sort=date%3AD%3AL%3Ad1&client=default_frontend&ud=1&oe=UTF-8&ie=UTF-8&proxystylesheet=default_frontend&site=default_collection&btnG=Search&q=revision+

This site is a gold mine of revision resources developed through the National Writing Project.

Reading First Instructional Strategies and Activities Resources

http://www.education.ky.gov/kde/instructional+resources/reading+first+in+kentucky/instruction/for+coaches/reading+first+instructional+menus.htm

These resources are intended to provide a compilation of SBRR instructional strategies and activities found in a variety of professional development materials/sessions experienced throughout the tenure of Reading First.

Writing to Explore

http://www.stenhouse.com/shop/pc/viewprd.asp?idProduct=9250&r=nb101206n

Research papers don't have to be boring to read or to write. This book demonstrates how to teach adventure writing, which motivates writers and guides teachers as they show students how to combine history and geography by using research to create atmosphere and descriptive settings. The result is an adventure-based paper that is "rooted in real places, supported by facts, and developed with detailed description of images from real locations."

***Education Week* Blog: Bring Back the Third R!**

http://www.ascd.org/ascd-express/vol6/605-newvoices.aspx?utm_source=ascdexpress&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=express605

This blog addresses insights from *Writing to Read*, a Carnegie Corporation report released earlier this year by the Alliance for Excellent Education. The blog focuses on the finding finds that writing is an often-overlooked tool for improving reading skills. It includes some strategies recommended in the Carnegie report. In addition, *Writing to Read* provides research-based evidence that validates that improving students' sentence construction skills not only improves their writing, but the strategy also improves their reading fluency.

Closing the Literacy Gap Help

http://www.kgw.com/news/local/Failing-report-for-Oregon-school-libraries-111567174.html

Research in this news video supports the positive effect that high-quality school library programs and certified librarians have on student achievement, particularly in the area of literacy. That research is supported in 20 studies across the United States, including additional studies here in Kentucky. Following the guidelines in *Beyond Proficiency @ your library* will help schools achieve.

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